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ABSTRACT

Preschool children participated in a classical music program to determine the effects of the program on their auditory discrimination skills. The development of auditory discrimination skills, considered a leading factor in reading readiness, is one of the objectives of the music program. Other objectives include emotional growth, experience in dramatic play, a broadened knowledge of music, fun and enjoyment, and development of increased attention span, direction-following skills, and cognitive skills. Seventy-seven five-year-olds, divided into experimental and control groups, were the subjects of the study. Weekly musical experiences for the experimental group grew from 20 to 50 minutes in length as the school year progressed. At the end of the program all children were tested using the Metropolitan Achievement Test, Slosson Intelligence Tests, and Wepman's Auditory Discrimination Test. The results showed better developed auditory skills for the experimental group and greater ability to handle instructional tasks. In addition, music learning appeared to cut through all teacher-observed I. Q. levels and maturity and age levels, and the children never tired of hearing the works. The usefulness of these results for curriculum developers wishing to integrate affective and skill level behaviors is suggested in the study. (JH)

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EFFECT OF PARTICIPATING IN A STRUCTURED CLASSICAL MUSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION SKILLS IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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A preliminary research program has shown that pre-school children who participated in an innovative planned classical music listening program exhibited better-developed auditory discrimination skills than did pre-school children who had not received such instruction.

Realizing that auditory discrimination has been proven to be the leading factor in reading readiness, (Tanker and McCullough, 1962), this unique program of classical music listening experiences was inagurated with pre-schoolers at the Methodist Weekday Kindergarten in Starkville, Mississippi. This fact, together with the facts that music, per se, exists only as an aural art, and that music has proven unique penetrating qualities, led to the basic assumption that pleasurable music listening experiences would help in developing needed auditory skills among pre-schoolers.

It was hypothesized that a group of pre-schoolers who had been exposed to classical listening experiences would have a higher degree of auditory discrimination skills than would a similar group who had not received such training.

DELIMITATIONS

The subjects were delimited to 77 five-year-olds who composed the experimental and control groups. The children were enrolled in private church-related kindergartens and were generally from culturally enriched homes. Both kindergartens were located in University towns and both operated under the same basic structure and general philosophy. The instructional period encompassed from September, 1973, through May, 1974.

PROCEDURE

Since a survey of related literature revealed an absence of any information concerning this type program for utilization of classical music at the pre-school level, the investigators developed and implemented their own program in music education. The overriding objective of this program was not just to teach classical music, but rather the objective was to teach the child through classical music.

Specific objectives of the program included: (1) to develop auditory skills; (2) to increase attention span; (3) to develop skill in following directions; (4) to provide exercise in the developmental thinking process; (5) to develop concepts of relationships; (6) to develop concepts of sequence; (7) to develop verbal skills; (8) to provide practice in retention of facts; (9) to foster emotional growth; (10) to provide experience in dramatic play; (11) to introduce and broaden knowledge of music; and (12) to provide fun and enjoyment.

Each new work was introduced at the associative level of learning, either by telling a story correlated with the work or by relating the new work to prior experiences with familiar works. Most, but not all, of the works included in the repetoire were classified as program music. The works utilized included "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" and "The Little Train" from the Once Upon a Time Suite by H. Donaldson, The Nutcracker Suite by Tchaikovsky, The Sorcerer's Apprentice by P. Dukas, Brother John and the Village Orchestra by Ehjurey, The Carnival of Animals by Saint-Saens, The Grand Canyon Suite by F. Grofe, Danse Macabre of Saint-Saens, Pictures at an Exhibition by Mussorgsky-Ravel and miscellaneous waltzes, marches and fugues.

Overt student involvement was a major aspect of each experience. The responses not only involved following verbal directions, but also depended upon the child's

ability to hear, understand and discriminate a particular aspect of the music. For example, the work, Danse Macabre contains three themes which had been suggested to represent skeletons, ghosts and witches. The children, after initial experience in which these theme entrances had been pointed out, were divided into three groups and each child was given a skeleton, a ghost or a witch. When the child heard his assigned thematic entrance, he was to fly his prop in rhythm to the music. Thus, the investigators had immediate, evaluative feedback as to the child's perception of the thematic entrances.

Other aspects of the program encompassed a wide spectrum of areas of teaching including emphasis on the general form, tempo, pitch, rhythm, timbre, harmony and instrumental recognition by sight and sound. Other activities included abstract drawing in rhythm to the music, rhythmic dramatization to the music, concrete drawing of the main representative idea of the piece and the development of experience charts. Verbalization concerning the works was encouraged. Their children were also encouraged to utilize their tonal memory in thematic recognition of the various works.

The music experiences initially were structured to be 20-minute group activities. However, by mid-year some of the music experiences had been gradually lengthened to last approximately 50 minutes. This was an indication of increased attention span on the part of the children. Each of the experimental groups received the planned music experiences approximately once a week. It is interesting to note,however, that upon the children's request, the individual kindergarten teachers carried on various follow-up activities with these works in their own classrooms.

The researchers observed some peculiar qualities of this program. The music learning seemed to cut through all teacher-observed I.Q. levels, as well as

maturity and age levels. The retention level, not only of the music itself, but also of facts concerning the music, such as composer form, instruments, mode, meter, etc., was high after several months. Furthermore, the children seemed never to tire of repeated hearings of the works; in fact, they requested repeated hearings almost to the point of demanding them.

COLLECTION OF DATA

At the close of the school year, May, 1974, the experimental and the control groups were tested. The following instruments were utilized for data collection: Metropolitan Achievement Test, Primary I Battery, Slosson Intelligence Test, I Form, and the Wepman's Auditory Discrimination Test. Because of the age and development of the younger children, a posttest only research design was utilized in this exploratory study.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Analysis of the data showed that the experimental group receiving the structured listening experiences made significantly fewer mistakes on both the X and Y scales of the Wepman instrument than did the control group (See Table I). The larger scores as shown by the control group indicate more mistakes made by these children and, consequently, less auditory skill development. Or, to state it another way, the experimental group made significantly fewer (.05 level) mistakes in discriminating between word sounds than did the control group. Hence, it may be concluded that the auditory skills of the experimental group were better developed.

The Y scale is used to indicate the validity of the subject's test responses, i.e., to determine whether or not the child is able to follow directions well enough for the X scores to be meaningful. It may be concluded that since the experimental group had a significantly lower (.01 level) mean Y-score, these

children made fewer mistakes in following directions when taking the test and were therefore better able to handle the instructional tasks of the test.

SUMMARY

The fact that a pleasurable classical music listening program has been shown to advantegeously influence the development of auditory skills among pre-schoolers has far-reaching and significant implications.

It is feasible to assume that such listening instruction in music education can serve as a mediating factor between developmentally-deprived primary children and their improvement in classroom performance, particularly in reading. Furthermore, with the increased emphasis being placed on pre-school education, the findings of this study should be helpful to curriculum developers in formulating curriculum objectives and activities in music programs for young children. Since this type of classical music listening program integrates both affective and skill level behaviors, it should be of interest to educators interested in the total child development concept.

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TABLE 1

AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION FOR PRESCHOOLERS AS RELATED TO PARTICIPATION IN A PLANNED PROGRAM IN CLASSICAL MUSIC INSTRUCTION

	Means for Auditory Scales		
Criterion Measure	Experimental	Control	F
Wepman X Scale	2.31	3.55	4.67*
Wepman Y Scale	.18	.69	10.20**

*F ≥ 3.98 Significant at .05 level.

**F ≥ 7.01 Significant at .01 level.